

for the record
~~Can you mention this testimony?~~

EXHIBIT 11
DATE Jan 31, 2011
HB 6

Testimony Supporting HB351 and Opposing HB11

I am Matt Donnelly, General Manager of the Gallatin Gateway County Water and Sewer District. The community of Gallatin Gateway has filed a grant application with the Treasure State Endowment Program to help fund a public sewer system. Our community is low income, some of our wells are contaminated by sewage, and our cesspools and septic tanks are only a few feet away from the Gallatin River. But I suspect that you will hear similar circumstances from other communities and from the engineering firms who have testified on this issue and who will testify behind me. So with your permission I'll present a different point of view.

A few years ago our community sought the assistance of a nonprofit organization called the Midwest Assistance Program to help with our project. MAP's mission is to provide assistance to rural communities experiencing infrastructure problems. It is funded by the US Department of Agriculture and by agencies of the state governments within the nine-state region that it covers. I am honored to have recently been asked to serve as a board member for MAP, representing the State of Montana.

It has been an eye-opener for me, interacting with the other board members from rural communities across the grain belt. We are all in the same predicament. State and federal regulators keep placing ever-more unfunded mandates upon our communities. But unlike our counterparts in the cities we have no full-time microbiologist on staff. We don't have a compliance officer or a grant administrator. We don't have the tax base. We only have a few volunteers who want to try to keep the community alive.

I want to talk about what's happening to rural communities in Montana. Our community might serve as a good example. We were platted in the late 1800's into 7000 square foot lots. The County Health Department won't permit any new septic systems on these small lots, and even bringing an existing system up to current standards is impossible. I am told that it takes about 10 acres to obtain a permit for a new septic system and drainfield. It's easy to draw the right conclusion. No new construction or even remodels can occur in our community, so new growth is occurring on 20 acre "ranchettes" and our agricultural resources are vanishing.

I can testify that this isn't unique to Montana. The destruction of rural communities is taking place all over the west. What is not so obvious is that it is a direct result of rural communities' inability to keep up with the infrastructure requirements placed on them because of new regulations. If rural residents can't build in the traditional communities, they will build on prime agricultural land and the sprawl will continue. For anyone who truly wants a cleaner environment based on principles of sustainability this has to be a nightmare.

We are seeing a trend away from rural communities and toward sprawl that is chewing up our productive agricultural land. The way to reverse this trend is to ensure that rural communities are financially equipped to build needed infrastructure. It is never the right time to balance Montana's budget by eating the seed corn. I urge you to invest in Montana's future, even if it causes a little pain in the present. Please support HB351 and oppose HB11. It's a vote you will remember with pride in 20 years when you see Montana's rural communities on the rebound.